

Staging Postmemory: Self-representation and Parental Biography in Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol's *El rumor del incendio*

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¿por la Reforma Carmen me decía
“no pesa el aire, aquí siempre es octubre”,
o se lo dijo a otro que he perdido
o yo lo invento y nadie me lo ha dicho?
—Octavio Paz, *Piedra de sol*

Rumores

*On the vast campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, the Centro Cultural Universitario (CCU), a secluded collection of theatres, museums, and cafes, feels as though it were not part of the chaotic capital city. There is very little traffic, save the overflowing, free PUMABUS campus shuttle, and the nature reserve surrounding the center drowns out the noise and rush inherent to city life. I did not know what to expect as I queued up to buy a deeply discounted ticket on “Jueves Puma,” the special-priced Thursdays that almost always sell out at the CCU. I paid for my ticket to see *El rumor del incendio* knowing only that it was billed as a “documental escénico.”*

The audience filed into the black-box theatre, the Foro Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, which was filling up quickly with a youngish crowd, the kind you’d expect at a university theatre. Smattered with a few older-but-hip-looking spectators, probably professors, the crowd negotiated the three rows of chairs set up on risers along two sides of the theatre. The seating formed a right angle, and as I sat on one edge, close to the wall, in the second row, I realized that those being turned away from saved seats were climbing up above to the balcony flimsily suspended above our heads. The set provided

plenty of visual interest as we waited for things to get started. The floor was covered with green, plastic indoor-outdoor carpeting that looked vaguely like a lawn, the kind that plastic flowers can be snapped into. The tracks of a toy train encircled a dinky Mexican flag. Blown-up, idyllic photographs of meadows and waterfalls formed the backdrop. A fish tank, figurines, and aluminum kitchenware covered the tables, pieces of plywood balanced on sawhorses.

The lights dimmed and the show began with a reading from the Constitution of 1917. I was dizzied by the rapid-fire crash-course on Priismo, the guerrilla, the teachers' movement of the '60s, the attack on the Madera barracks, Lucio Cabañas, Genaro Vázquez... Some of it was reenacted using toy soldiers and a video camera that projected the action onto a screen for all to see; some of it was merely recited quickly, as a child spews a memorized lesson before it is forgotten. Comandante Margarita, the protagonist, held all of the disparate parts together. Her life story took her from Chihuahua to Mexico City to Jalapa, and as the play drew to a close the actress portraying her smoked a cigarette while addressing us directly, recounting Margarita's death from cancer. She announced that Margarita, the character, was her mother in real life, and at once the play's relationship to reality intensified terrifically. I was, in that moment, the unsuspecting spectator, taken in by the fiction of the theatre and the promise of truth offered at the play's conclusion.

Documentary Reality

During the 1970s, Mexico's *guerrilla* movements usurped the role of family as the fundamental unit of society for their members, asking adherents to give themselves over completely to the cause.¹ These reconstructed families leave the next generation, those children born in the 1970s and early 80s, with many questions about their origins. By interrogating their parents' biographies, the children construct themselves. In families torn apart by political or domestic violence, a child may access an absent family member through inherited stories. Contemporary theatre of the real draws on those stories to re/create lost histories. Mexican theatre company Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol attempts to make sense of fractured generational stories in its 2010 project, *La rebeldía*, a multi-genre work that includes the play *El rumor del incendio*, the blog *El rumor del oleaje*, and the book *El rumor de este momento*. *La rebeldía*'s creators invert genealogy's top-down hierarchy by giving birth to themselves, creating their own legacy, self-consciously mapping out an image of themselves. This essay focuses on how self-representation combines

with parental biographying (actors representing their parents' biographies onstage) in *El rumor del incendio* to question the generic boundaries between autobiography and biography, documentary and fiction, ultimately redefining drama's social function. It examines the strategies used to convey the family ties between Margarita and Pardo, which include documentary evidence, bodily relationships, and genealogical connections.

At the peak of what Mario Vargas Llosa called its "perfect dictatorship" under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico's perfection did not preclude resistance from student groups, militias, and peasant movements. Decades later, in *El rumor del incendio* (2010) and its accompanying publications, director and actor Luisa Pardo plays both herself and her real-life mother, Margarita. I argue that theatrical self-representation challenges the auto/biographical genre, blurring lines between biography and autobiography, and redefining drama, asking spectators to consider the stage an alternative source of historical fact. Plays in which an actor plays him- or herself, convincing the audience that the events represented are "real," often hide the mediation of writing, interviewing, researching, and rehearsing as the audience makes a one-to-one equivalence between the character and the historical person. The actor's body becomes a site of erasure: erasing authorship, erasing theatricality. This erasure, however, is misleading. The mechanism of the theatre, with director, actors, and audience cooperating to create meaning, along with the relationship between text and performance, renders autobiographical transmission anything but direct.

Several scholars have taken up the question of representing the real in Latin American cultural production. Ileana Diéguez cites the inclusion of research as a primary function of the artistic creation in contemporary performance practices, observing that the "artistas devienen documentadores y testimoniantes del dolor de los demás" ("La práctica artística" 77). Sylvia Molloy praises Spanish American autobiography's tendency for tapping into a communal, family memory because it allows the text to "captur[e] a tension between self and other, of generating a reflection on the fluctuating place of the subject within its community, of allowing for other voices, besides that of the 'I,' to be heard in the text" (9). In *El rumor del incendio*, this tension expands to include the self against national history, placing official discourses alongside familial and individual voices. This difficulty of pinpointing the place where self ends and other begins relates to problems defining one generation's relationship to a previous generation's experience. Marianne Hirsch teases out this intersection between past and present, per-

sonal and collective, with the term “postmemory,” which “is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (*Family Frames* 22). Indeed, in *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch highlights the prefix “post-” to define such relationships (3). As Hirsch argues, it is not *remembered* experiences that define postmemory, but rather “[p]ostmemorial work [...] strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression”² (*The Generation* 33). The memory displayed in plays like *Lagartijas*³ includes both previous generations’ experiences and those connections discovered and reconstructed through archival research.⁴

In reference to this performance of archival research, Carol Martin states, “adherence to an archive makes documentary theatre appear closer to actuality than fiction. The archive is concrete, historically situated, and relatively permanent; it is material and lasting while theatrical representation is intangible and ephemeral” (*Dramaturgy* 19). Rather than adhering to an archive, I would use the verb *to manipulate*; in the case of *El rumor del incendio* the archive is physically present, often in the form of stacks of paper or video footage, but the young actors are clearly mediating it. It is precisely the manipulation of the concrete archive in *Lagartijas*’ play that gives weight to its intangible theatrical representation, and also, therefore, insists upon the self’s existence while simultaneously questioning the very concept of the self as a finite unit. While Paola Hernández argues that contemporary Argentine biographical theatre allows for a “Yo con muchos posibles centros” (126), a multiplicity of I’s is an apt description of the center of *El rumor del incendio*. As Martin concludes, “[...] what is real and what is true are not necessarily the same. A text can be fictional yet true. A text can be nonfictional yet untrue. Documentary theatre is an imperfect answer that needs our obsessive analytical attention especially since, in ways unlike any other form of theatre, it claims to have bodies of evidence” (*Dramaturgy* 24). In *El rumor del incendio*, these declarations go beyond the binary categories true/false, fiction/nonfiction, and real/fantasy. The play makes historical and political claims about what happened in Mexico in the 1970s, but also stakes a claim on the un/truth of the self: the individual is presented as an entity with fluid boundaries, difficult to limit and capable of absorbing other selves.

The play’s documentary nature emphasizes the concept of “truth.” Diana Taylor writes about “theatre of crisis,” which “depends on the spectators’ ability to accept dramatic conventions and momentarily believe that

the unreal is real [... T]heatre simultaneously allows us to erase, block out, and derealize the real" (*Theatre of Crisis* 11). Theatre of the real, like *El rumor del incendio*, attempts to rerealize that suspended reality.⁵ Offstage reality must enter theatre's representational field in order to be understood as real. This is the backbone of the play's making of meaning, while the other tools rest upon a pact between the various participants in the play (actors, director, dramaturge, author, audience). The participants willingly suspend disbelief beyond Coleridge's "poetic faith," and believe that the material presented and the bodies presenting it are what they purport to be, *really*. As Janelle Reinelt puts it, "Spectators come to a [documentary] theatrical event believing that certain aspects of the performance are directly linked to the reality they are trying to experience or understand. This does not mean they expect unmediated access to the truth in question, but that the documents have something significant to offer" (9). This expectation is important for works like *Lagartijas*, which come with historical and political baggage. Similarly, it is important to understand that this pact involves an understanding that the audience is not naïve, but rather wise to the documentary genre and its problems. Indeed, just as the narrative *testimonio* often, according to John Beverley, "appears [...] as an extraliterary or even antiliterary form of discourse" (42), the dramatic documentary, too, can seem antitheatrical, something outside theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* takes up theatre's recent turn toward performance, and the inclusion of the real onstage forms part of the postdramatic tendency. The audience must enter into a new pact with the theatre, one that accepts both representation and reality as possible stage co-inhabitants. This understanding includes the difficulties inherent in any auto/biographical project as well, and we can assume these issues are part of the play's draw.⁶ If the selves being represented onstage are present, physically in the case of the children and figuratively in the case of the parents, then the "truth" takes on an important if somewhat suspicious significance in the play.

Staging Rebellion

In order to demonstrate the way in which the limits of the self expand to include the collective, I turn to *El rumor del incendio*'s evidence, which conveys the reality of the play's historical content and the relationship between the past and the present. As Paola Hernández points out, 21st-century Latin American documentary theatre questions the validity of the archive itself, fusing the public and the private. *El rumor del incendio* follows suit. I

examine the play's evidence, dividing it into three categories: documentary, corporeal, and genealogical. Finally, I conclude by analyzing how the play's expanded definition of the self also defies definitions of both autobiography and theatre.

I will focus mainly on the dramatic production of *El rumor del incendio*, which challenges generic borders, while briefly examining the paratextual world of the play, *El rumor del oleaje* and *El rumor de este momento*, as supports for the theatrical work. The play premiered at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and is to date regularly presented at festivals in Europe and the Americas, winning the Spectators' Prize at the Festival Impatience, as well as the ZKB Förderpreis at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel. It recounts the history of armed resistance movements in Mexico in the 1960s and 70s, using the life of Comandante Margarita, played by Luisa Pardo, as the narrative thread. Characterized by the company as a "documental escénico," the play presents historical data, video footage, and excerpts from the Mexican constitution alongside recreations of battles using toy soldiers and torture scenes in which Pardo conspicuously applies make-up to represent wounds, a combination reminiscent of Diana Taylor's archive ("the grisly record of criminal violence—the documents, photographs, and remains that tell of disappearances") and repertoire ("the tales of the survivors, their gestures, the traumatic flashbacks, repeats, and hallucinations—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral and invalid forms of knowledge and evidence") (*The Archive* 192-93). This juxtaposition of factual information with theatrical elements complicates generic assumptions about both history and theatre.

The play's most surprising turn occurs in the final scene, a monologue by Comandante Margarita, in which she recounts her life after the resistance up to the birth of her child, "La Luisita." At this point Pardo breaks character and announces that she is Luisa, that her mother was Margarita, and that the project is a reaction to questions the company asked themselves about what its members could do to live up to the legacy of their parents' struggle. This break in character only occurs in the play's final moments, but is of utmost importance for this inquiry into the nature of autobiography and theatre. It shows the way that theatrical self-representation challenges the autobiographical genre by blurring lines between biography and autobiography, as well as redefining drama, asking spectators to consider the stage as an alternative source of historical fact.

Documenting the Self

On the one hand, *El rumor del incendio* pays homage to the heroic parents whose lives it portrays. On the other, the play is more about their children's attempt to construct a self from an incomplete family legacy. Martin affirms that "most contemporary documentary theatre makes the claim that everything presented is part of the archive" and that "more often than not documentary theatre is where 'real people' are absent—unavailable, dead, disappeared—yet reenacted" (*Dramaturgy* 18). In the case I analyze here, however, what the play presents does not come entirely from the archive, but also includes material that originates in memory, specifically the performer/children's memories of their parents. Similarly, the "real people" are only partially absent—the children, playing themselves, are present. Martin's point that "documentary theatre can directly intervene in the creation of history by unsettling the present by staging a disquieting past" (*Dramaturgy* 18) is especially valid here. The play at once creates history, remitting to the parent/past, and unsettles the present, theatricalizing the child/present. How does representing a supposedly real family member and her life story expand the boundaries of the self? What strategies does the play use to challenge the limits of the self? In this play, and others that incorporate family members' biographies, I find three discrete branches of discursive strategies that question the concept of a self-defined, first-hand experience and memory: documentary, corporeal, and genealogical.

The first branch, the documentary, describes the use of documents as evidence of the veracity of the content presented in the play. These documents might take the form of court proceedings, personal writings, and family photographs. Besides extending the bounds of the play to include the real world, these documents also work as extensions of the actor-characters' memories and selves.⁷ The second strategy is the corporeal, which unites past and present. In *At Face Value*, Sylvia Molloy mentions the autobiographer's "anxiety of closure": "How shall I write down that asymptotic point where my past and my present connect?" (34). The answer I find upon analyzing autobiographical manifestations in contemporary theatre has to do with the action of "writing down." Here the asymptotic point is found not in writing but in embodiment. The actor-characters use corporeal practices and physical relics (in the case of the voice) to configure a lived memory, a re/presentation of the parent as part of the actor-child's body. The third strategy is the genealogical, another one in which the play insists upon the connections between the actor-characters and the historical. Through the selective presentation

of credible, inherited material and an emphasis on proper names, the play extends the reach of the autobiographical self-portrayed to include the biographical self of the parent. The dramatic process, however, both transmits and transforms this information.

Performing Texts: Documentary Evidence

In *La rebeldía*, a variety of documents is used to extend the reach of the autobiographical self to include the experiences of family members. Throughout the project, documents form the basis for familial connections. The book *El rumor de este momento*, along with other paratexts like the blog *El rumor del oleaje* or the handbill, clues the audience in to the identities of the represented characters. As Margarita's final monologue ends with the birth of "La Luisita," the alert spectator might wonder whether the actress identified as Luisa Pardo in the program has anything to do with the diminutive name. In this way paratextual documents establish genetic links between the characters and their creators, which challenges the traditional definition of theatre as a space of fictional representation.

In the scene of Margarita's incarceration, the three actor-characters depend on documentary evidence to reconstruct the situation and to reinforce the reality they present. The characters "G" (Gabino Rodríguez) and "P" (Paco Barreira) recite the events of the arrest in a journalistic style, citing court documents. This key moment interweaves documentary evidence with theatricality, thereby merging first- and secondhand experience. As G and P cite legal documents, Margarita is stylistically tortured. Slowly, deliberately, and openly, she rubs black makeup over her face to represent wounds, the result of the simulated beating (see fig. 1). Her head is placed in a basin full of water, but the actors do not attempt to recreate the torture in a realistic way. Harkening back to Brechtian alienation, the audience is obliged to watch violence that is clearly a representation.

The fact is that the three actor-characters are incapable of reliving history, no matter how much historical research they do or how much data they have to support their stories. Here the tension derived from the habitation of one body by both mother and daughter comes to the forefront. As much as Luisa would like to transmit her mother, embody her, her actions as Margarita will always be a copy—theatre. At the same time, however, it is more than just a copy. Rather than simulating being another character, as she would were she playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*, say, Pardo demonstrates her connection to her mother by imperfectly playing her. In *El rumor del*



Gabino Rodríguez, Luisa Pardo, and Paco Barreira in *El rumor del incendio*.

Source: Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol <http://lagartijastiradasalsol.blogspot.com/p/el-rumor.html>

incendio, the incompatibility of documentary evidence and the representation of past violence, undertaken and experienced by absent bodies, creates friction between the reality of the familial connections proposed by the play and the fictional nature of theatrical representation. The detention scene at once emphasizes the representative nature of theatre and reveals the problems inherent in representing the self. Pardo, attempting to “play” her mother but also herself, as she does at the end of the play, claims authority over her mother’s life, an extension of her own. Margarita’s biography is, in this way, subsumed into Pardo’s autobiography, expanding her life beyond its years, experience, and consciousness.

While Margarita is in prison, her family once again plays an important role. During her incarceration in the women’s prison, Margarita addresses the audience, outlining her sister’s involvement with prisoners:

Mi hermana visitaba a varios presos en diferentes cárceles y a todos nos ayudaba con trámites legales y papeleo. A mí me iba a ver los miércoles y domingos. A veces lloraba mucho, se ponía triste de verme ahí. Me contaba que tenía que atravesar la ciudad y luego tomar un camión que viajaba lejos por una avenida sin pavimentar, en

ese entonces Santa Martha Acatitla estaba en las orillas de la ciudad.
 Vio atardeceres muy bonitos cuando salía de visitarme en la cárcel.
 (*El rumor de este momento* 105-106)

Margarita's sister plays an important role in connecting Margarita with the greater world. Whereas Margarita is trapped in captivity, her sister moves freely and attempts to liberate the captives through paperwork. Legal documentation of detentions and appeals becomes the link between past and present, lending credence to Margarita's claims. While, in this case, the paperwork is never produced, the mention of it implies officialdom and the metaphorical prison that bureaucracy can represent. Finally, the prisoners' dependence on the sister's help with legal documents reminds the audience of the real-life impact that documents can have. Without Margarita's sister and the documents as go-betweens, the prisoners would have had little or no hope of freedom. The free sister provides the imprisoned one with a proxy body that can leave the prison, and returns with descriptions of landscapes that Margarita herself cannot experience firsthand. The secondhand experience of her sister's life likens Margarita's position to that of her daughter, actor-character Luisa, who must recreate her mother's life through secondhand information. The self at play here is uncontainable, but must pull from discovered, uncovered, and second-hand experiences in order to represent itself.

Putting on the Parents: Corporeal Evidence

In *El rumor del incendio*, Luisa's putting on of Margarita is not a manifest act until the end of the play. This results in a series of doublings that emphasizes the hollow where Margarita should be. In her essay on political documentary film, "Political Mimesis," Jane M. Gaines asserts that revolutionary documentary films are able to bring about social change through a bodily relationship rather than relying necessarily on political consciousness-raising. She argues that bodies react identificatorily to sensational or sensual images on the screen. Gaines writes that "*political memory* has to do with the production of affect in and through the conventionalized imagery of struggle: bloodied bodies, marching throngs, angry police" (92). This sensuous struggle is also mimeticized in documentary theatre. And here, rather than bodies onscreen making the bodies of the spectators (re)act, there is yet another level of obligatory bodily action. As in Diéguez' "escenarios liminales," in which "elaboraciones estéticas no se desmarcan de las decisiones éticas o de los motivos que las generan" (*Escenarios* 151), *El rumor del incendio* is inseparable from the reality it represents. Margarita, the character whose body

is at the epicenter of the play, is not present for the scenes of torture; there is no film reel of her interrogation and no photograph of her broken body projected onstage. Rather, her daughter stands in for her. Pardo's body must act for Margarita's, in turn making the spectators' bodies do "something."

In this dance around the empty center, not only Luisa, but also the phantom-like character of Margarita's sister participates. The sister, a Celestina figure, almost always comes up in tandem with one of Margarita's lovers. She first comes into the story right after the description of Margarita's parents: "Desde los 15 años, mi hermana y yo, que nos llevábamos muy bien, nos íbamos a bailar, nos poníamos bien guapas, de vestido corto y todo, nos maquillábamos las piernas. Nos hacíamos de esos peinados altos, así" (*El rumor de este momento* 96). Here the bodies—that of Margarita, but also its double, her sister's—amplify the physicality of youth and sexual attraction. Through the use of the first-person plural, Luisa, playing Margarita, is a third representation of this succulence in her own short dress. In an absent Margarita's place, the accumulation of descriptions and representations of youthful bodies attempts to provide a substitute for the missing body at the center of the play. Here it is substitution rather than subsuming that expands Pardo's autobiography to include her mother's biography.

Recorded sound also plays an important part in establishing Margarita as a family member in *Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol*'s play. The recorded sound is the voice of Héctor, who was Margarita's fellow researcher and lover. While his voice is not identified onstage, in the text his interventions are identified as "*Fragmento sonoro de Héctor*."⁸ During the scene of Margarita's imprisonment, the clip plays Héctor's voice, saying, "Recuerdo que tu madre me decía que en la celda se imaginaba que era una hoja de papel y así podía escaparse doblada por debajo de la puerta" (105). Here the metaphor of transforming the body into a sheet of paper works as the inverse of the theatrical process. Whereas Margarita wishes to disintegrate her physical body and become a two-dimensional blank slate, so to speak, *Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol* brings the documentary evidence of their archival research—stacks and stacks of papers—to life, reintegrating the historical record in bodily form.

Without the paratext of the book, it would be impossible to tell whether the recorded voice belongs to either Gabino or Paco, or a friend or relative of Margarita. The text backs up the recordings' veracity by identifying them as the voice of Héctor, while Margarita provides the backstory for her relationship with this figure:

MARGARITA. Conocí a Héctor, también trabajaba en el equipo de investigación... y nos pegó el amor... apasionadamente, nos gustamos mucho, nos quisimos mucho durante tres años... pienso en eso pero es difícil creer en mis propios recuerdos porque son demasiado felices para ser ciertos, porque continuamente parecen estar recordando la felicidad de otras personas.

(FRAGMENTO SONORO DE HECTOR). Pero todo se fue, es difícil creer en mis propios recuerdos porque son demasiado felices para ser ciertos, porque continuamente parecen estar recordando la felicidad de otras personas. (*El rumor de este momento* 121)

In this clip, the second of two, Margarita's reference to Héctor explains his role and relationship to her. As he is identified only in print and only by his first name, the information about their three-year affair aids the reader's understanding (but not the spectator's) of the sound clips' significance, and also to bolster the case for the story's historical veracity. This sound clip anchors Margarita in time, always pointing toward the past. The echo presentation of the sound clip, which repeats Margarita's lines, curiously inverts chronology. While Margarita is the first to speak the line within the narrative of the play, Héctor's recorded repetition of it means that he actually spoke it first, before the performance. This opens up, if not the spatial fourth wall, then its chronological equivalent, reaching back in time and pulling completed events into the time-fabric of the play.

In yet another twist of the order of things, Héctor, in his recording, might have been repeating something that Margarita had once said to him. In this temporal *mise en abyme*, it is impossible to tell where the line originates, who uttered it first. What Mladen Dolar calls the "acousmatic voice" necessarily recalls the absent body of Margarita at the center of the play: "[T]he voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body. It indicates that the signifier, however purely logical and differential, must have a point of origin and emission in the body" (59). This infinite mirroring of words, language, and voice seems to thereby reinforce itself and the factual nature of the subject matter as well as the reality of the absent bodies the play invokes. The line, itself, too, reflects an uncertain origin, with the assertion that one's own memories might, in fact, belong to someone else. This is the fulcrum on which the play's argument rests. *El rumor del incendio* makes the claim that Pardo's research recovers her mother's memories, and that genetic relationship implies an experiential relationship.

Bloodlines: Genealogical Evidence

Genealogy and its emphasis on proper names is another strategy employed in *El rumor del incendio* to expand the definition of autobiography as well as emphasize the reality of the play. Names are important for establishing family connection, in theatre as in life. Even if the audience believes Margarita Urías Hermosillo to be a fictional character at the start of the play, her character is rooted in history, given a family tree, and thereby historicized. This genealogy registers her in reality. Margarita introduces herself at the beginning of the play, directly addressing the audience. She shares a photograph of her father, speaking about him and her mother. Margarita also mentions another Luisa, a character her father created for the textbooks he wrote, hinting at a connection to Luisa Pardo, the actor-character. The image of her 1978 passport in the book *El rumor de este momento* (see fig. 2) further supports the naming connection between Margarita and her family members, confirming that her paternal and maternal surnames match up with those she mentions in the play.



Passport of Margarita Urías Hermosillo.
Source: Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol, *El rumor de este momento*.

As part of the larger project *La rebeldía*, a book and blog accompany the play. The book, *El rumor de este momento*, is often sold at shows, a concrete souvenir for spectators. It comprises a series of essays on rebellion as well as the script of *El rumor del incendio*, photos, and other documentary evidence of the reality of the play's content. The spectator who purchases *El rumor de este momento* upon exiting the theatre finds an essay therein by Rómulo Pardo Urías entitled "Colofón" and elaborately signed. Rómulo's last names instantly tip off the reader to his relationships with both Margarita and Luisa. He spurns subtlety, signing his essay with a colorful, annotated "ficha de identidad":

Nombre y origen literario: **Rómulo**, romano mitológico, latino fundador, itálico épico.

Apellido paterno: **Pardo**, español castellano, criollo mestizo mexicano de cuarta generación, veracruzano y volador papanteco.

Apellido materno: **Urías**, chihuahuense, furioso intelectualista, marcial belicoso, apache sin tregua. (82)

This grandiose signature can be read as self-aggrandizing, or as a signpost pointing to the relationship between and reality of Rómulo, Luisa, and Margarita. Just as the colophon identifies the printer by name, indicating the origin of the printed text, the use of names by Margarita, the character, and Rómulo, the writer, points to the family origins of the character and story presented in *El rumor del incendio*. The emphasis not only on the shared last names, but also their racial heritage, is another tactic that roots these character-author-actors into a context, specifically a post-colonial Mexico. However, this insistence on reality contains within it a parallel insistence on fiction—Rómulo hearkens back to the mythical founding of Rome, and the epic, furious, and relentless adjectives lend the name tongue-in-cheek hyperbole.

Margarita, in *El rumor del incendio*, also constructs her family tree to insist on her social position. In an almost biblical manner, or at least that of a Naturalist novel, the careful construction of a genealogy gives Margarita a dimension that stretches back into the past and, implicitly, into the future, to include her daughter. The bloodlines trace down through her children, Emiliano and Rómulo, finally arriving at Luisa. During the last scene of the play, Margarita transforms into Luisa, publicly enacting the bloodline that connects them:

MARGARITA. Y seguía trabajando, iba y venía de Xalapa, Df, Hermosillo, Chihuahua, después de tener a Romulito, me embaracé luego luego, porque quería tener una niña y ya se me estaba pasando el

tiempo. En los ultrasonidos salía que iba a ser niño... pero yo deseaba la niña y la deseaba y la deseaba... en enero del 83 nació la Luisita. LUISA. Me llamo Luisa. Nací en la ciudad de México el 10 de enero de 1983. Soy hija de Margarita y Rafael. (*El rumor de este momento* 130-31)

This moment is extremely significant for the project. Both Margarita and Luisa are present in one body. The narration links them together just as their bodies are genetically linked, although there are hints at the chinks in the auto/biographical armor. More important than medical science is the desire of the mother in determining the sex of her baby, in an instance of affect winning out over genetics. The idea of desire trumping reality seems to turn the argument I've been advancing on its head—the fiction of theatre as replaced by reality; the distinction dissolved between autobiography and biography. However, this instance of the symbolic winning out over the scientifically real causes the viewer to qualify her understanding of truth. The evidence for the heart's desire winning out is right before the audience's eyes in the body of Pardo. She is, indeed, the hoped-for girl and, through her mere presence, insists on a deeper truth than that which the documentary evidence can provide.

Theatrical Truth

Postdramatic theatre in general, and documentary theatre in particular, subverts the fictional utopia of the stage. In its place, plays like *El rumor del incendio* shorten the distance between stage and spectator, enveloping audiences, forcing them to consider the reality or fiction of what is represented. Using documentary evidence, such as legal reports and newspapers, corporeal techniques that suggest a biological connection between onstage actors and absent characters, and genealogical links that claim, through proper names and bloodlines, authority over inherited stories, *El rumor del incendio* questions generic limits. Not only does the play challenge autobiography as a genre, allowing for the inclusion of postmemory, another generation's trauma, in one's own life story, but it also challenges theatre itself. Rather than symbolic representation, the theatre becomes an alternative source of truth among more traditional discourses like history and journalism.

The idea of a deeper truth safeguarded in the body, passed down from parent to child, at once affirms and negates the challenge of *El rumor del incendio*, namely, subverting theatrical and autobiographical genre. While the body onstage is, indeed, the real-life daughter of the historical figure represented by the character of Comandante Margarita, it is also, of course,

participating in the repeated, scripted representation of Margarita's life. The play is real and also representational. Similarly, the concrete nature of Pardo's body displays her individual limits. At the same time, though, her claim to inherited truth insists on continuity between the biographical and autobiographical. In *El rumor del incendio*, the physicality of absence—whether as the absent parent embodied by the present child, the physical presence of the sound of the absent character's voice, or the use of physical objects as a psychic extension of the absent parent—constantly challenges the limits of the self, especially the limit that is death. Even as the empty center of both plays is constantly invoked, the actor-characters make every attempt to fill the emptiness with materiality and, ultimately, the body. This self-sacrifice, an exchange of the “innocent” child for the lost parent, has powerful cultural resonances and insists upon a solidarity, which hearkens back to the very origins of performance and ritual.

This solidarity is an affirmation of the self and the auto/biographical genre as well as a challenge to conventional understandings of these concepts. The audience, convinced of the authority of the actor-children to claim family stories in their own life story, must then agree to accept a self that goes beyond the concept of one individual and encompasses a whole history of passed down memories and inherited experiences. *El rumor del incendio*, like so much 21st-century Latin American auto/biographical theatre, attempts to elevate the stage, deeming it a source of truth.

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Notes

¹ For more on Mexican guerrilla movements, see Laura Castellanos' *México armado 1943-1981*, a journalistic history of armed movements in the country in the 20th century, or Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedilla's *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico*, which seeks to shed light on Mexico's Dirty War, likening it to other Latin American 20th-century dictatorships.

² Emphasis in original.

³ Other examples of plays in which actors portray themselves and their parents in post-dictatorial Latin American settings include Lola Arias' *Mi vida después* (2009) and *El año en que nació* (2012), and Sebastián Rubio and Claudia Tango's *Proyecto 1980-2000, El tiempo que heredé* (2013). Critics such as Oscar Cornago Bernal, Paola Hernández, and Brenda Werth have all treated this phenomenon in the Argentine context, while Beatriz Trastoy and Deirdre Heddon both have published important books on autobiographical representation in the theatre. Trastoy's *Teatro autobiográfico* argues that the post-dictatorial context of Argentina in the 1980s and 1990s led to a privileging of the body and narrative as a response to state-sponsored terrorism's attempts to limit both of these modes. Heddon, on the other

hand, argues for the political potential of autobiographical performance in the UK and the US, with a special emphasis on autobiography's feminist roots. Finally, it is important to mention Vivi Tellas, whose pioneering work directing the *Biodrama* series in Buenos Aires' Teatro Sarmiento (where *Mi vida después* first appeared) as well as her own auto/biographical play, *Mi mamá y mi tía*, are important precursors to this phenomenon.

⁴ Pardo states that she didn't know much about her mother's life before she did the archival research for the play: "[S]e hizo la investigación de la vida de mi mamá, que de tal vida tampoco no sabíamos nada, ¿no? Teníamos ideas—la idea de que estuvo en la cárcel, pero entonces fue sacar sus cartas, entrevistar a sus amigos, a los familiares [...]" (Ward 139-40).

⁵ See Carol Martin's useful overview of nomenclature and definitions for theatre of the real in the first chapter of *Theatre of the Real*: "The phrase 'theatre of the real' identifies a wide range of theatre practices and styles that recycle reality, whether that reality is personal, social, political, or historical. In using the phrase, I aim to note theatre's participation in today's addiction to and question of the real as it is presented across media and genres" (*Theatre of the Real* 5).

⁶ Philippe Lejeune's classic *On Autobiography* lays out the autobiographical pact, which assumes that author, narrator, and protagonist are one and the same, as well as pointing out the paradoxes inherent in such an understanding.

⁷ I will distinguish between "actor" and "actor-character" even though they are supposedly one and the same. Actor will refer to the actual biographical subject, while actor-character will refer to the staged version of the same.

⁸ This is probably a reference to Héctor Aguilar Camín, but neither the play nor its paratexts provide confirmation for this inference.

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